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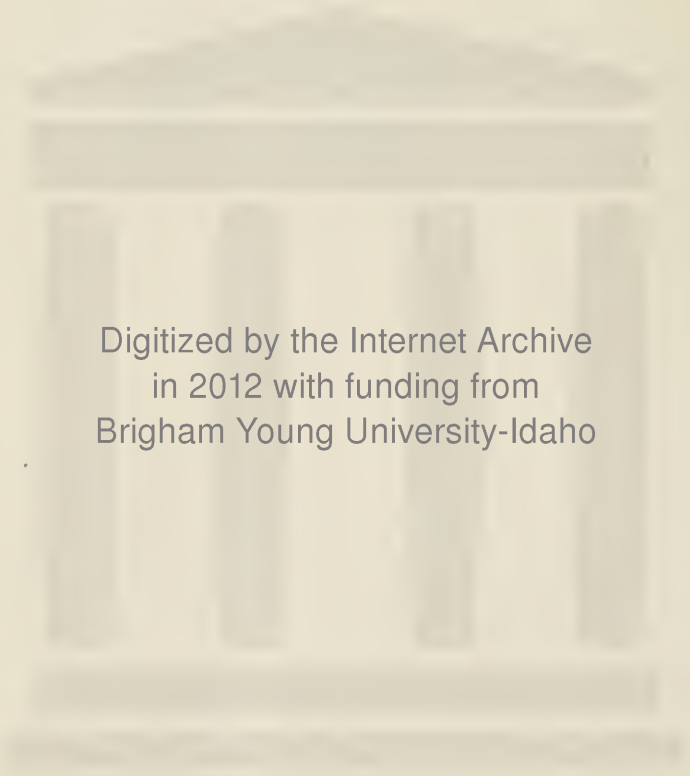
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# The Lake English Classics

EDITED BY

LINDSAY TODD DAMON, A. B.

*Professor of Rhetoric in Brown University*

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THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

AND

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

EDITED FOR SCHOOL USE

BY

WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY, A.M.

Assistant Professor of English, The University of Chicago

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FEB 26 '53

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

## INTRODUCTION

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### LIFE OF COLERIDGE

#### I

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, a remarkable change began to take place in English poetry. For more than a century, first under the leadership of Dryden, and then under that of Pope, poets had striven to give their verse formal correctness and elegance at the expense of naturalness and spontaneity. They had given up the free forms of verse used by the Elizabethan poets, and confined themselves almost entirely to a single form, the rhymed couplet. Subjects of romance and passion, such as the Elizabethans had loved, were discarded for more mundane themes, which could be handled with wit and precision, or with stately dignity of manner. But in the verse of Collins, Gray, Crabbe, and Burns, there appeared a strong protest against all this. Poets began to reassert their right

to represent the world of nature and men as they saw them, full of color, mystery, and emotion.

This literary revolution, which marks the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries, we call—not very exactly—the Romantic movement; and of this movement Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the most interesting figures. His significance is of two sorts, as philosopher and as poet. As philosopher he brought into England the new system of thought developed in Germany by Kant and his followers,—a life-long work, which took his best in energy and in time. As poet, his work is small in bulk, and was accomplished almost entirely in a single wonderful year. But, small as it is in bulk, it occupies a place of the first importance in the history of English literature and, what is more to our purpose, has at its best a peculiarly enthralling beauty which we shall look in vain to find elsewhere.

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## II

Coleridge was born October 21, 1772, at the vicarage of Ottery St. Mary, in the county of Devonshire, England. His father was as eccentric and unworldly as a country parson and the father of Coleridge should have been. Of Coleridge's early life we get vivid glimpses

from his later letters; one remembers especially his slashing with a stick at rows of nettles representing the Seven Champions of Christendom. Such games were apt to be solitary, for, as he says himself, he "never thought or spoke as a child," and his <sup>forwardness</sup> precocity had <sup>developed</sup> the inevitable effect of isolating him from his boisterous brothers.

When nine years old, he was sent to Christ's Hospital, an ancient charity school in the heart of London. Here he met Charles Lamb, to whose essays the student should turn for a picture of the school as it appeared then to boyish eyes. The orphan from the country, lonesome and friendless, who figures in the essay, *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago*, is Coleridge, a little manipulated for pathos perhaps.

A pleasant anecdote of this school period narrates that one day Coleridge was walking in the streets of London and moving his arms about in a strange manner, when he accidentally touched the pocket of an old gentleman passing. The irate citizen was about to hand him over to the police as a pickpocket. "I am not a pickpocket, sir," the boy protested, "I only thought I was Leander swimming the Hellespont!" The old gentleman forthwith subscribed to a circulating library in order to give Leander his fill of books. The story continues that he read the whole list through without skipping a volume.

Whether this last assertion is true or not, Coleridge achieved, while at school, a great reputation for learning. Lamb speaks of the "deep, sweet intonations" with which his friend used to recite Greek hexameters and expound the mysteries of abstruse philosophers like Jamblichus and Plotinus to casual passers in the halls of Christ's Hospital, while they stood astounded before him, as before a "young *Mirandola*,"\* and "the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed the accents of the inspired charity boy." It was here, too, that Coleridge underwent the first profound poetic influence of his life. This he found in the sonnets of Bowles, a poet now entirely forgotten. The influence was for good, since Bowles, though not a strong writer, was a natural one, from whose verse Coleridge could learn, in a mild form, the new ideals of poetry which he himself was to embody in more vivid work.

At nineteen, Coleridge entered Jesus College, Cambridge. Here he met Southey, and plunged with him at once into the enthusiasm for social progress and political regeneration which the French revolution had aroused in all ardent young breasts. His ardor was temporarily dampened by anxiety over some college debts which drove him to London and landed him at last in the recruiting office of the 15th Light Dra-

---

\*Pico della Mirandola, an Italian scholar of the early Renaissance, famous for his precocious learning.

poons. He passed two wretched months of service. Fortunately, he was a favorite with his messmates, and spent his time writing their letters home to mothers and sweethearts, while they groomed and saddled his horse. A Latin lament which he scribbled on the wall under his saddle-peg, caught the attention of a lettered captain, and "Private Cumberback," as he had signed himself in humorous allusion to his lack of horsemanship, was sent back to Cambridge to finish his studies. The incident illustrates his impulsiveness and human charm, as well as the vacillation of will which was to prove so fatal to him.

---

### III

After leaving college, Coleridge went with Southey to Bristol, Southey's home. Here the two friends evolved a radiant scheme for the future. They determined to make actual some of the utopian theories in the air at the time, by establishing an ideal community across the ocean, on the banks of the Susquehanna. The site was chosen chiefly, one must imagine, because of the musical name. In this virgin Paradise,



they and their fellow-colonists, with their wives, were to share in common the two hours a day of toil necessary to make the wilderness bloom as a rose, and to devote the remainder of their time to elevating pursuits. Southey's more practical nature made him abandon this grand scheme of Pantisocracy, as it was called, long before Coleridge lost faith in it; and his desertion led to a rupture between the friends which was not healed for a long time. A part of their program, however, they proceeded to carry out: Coleridge married, in October, 1795, Miss Sarah Fricker, of Bristol; and six weeks later Southey married her sister Edith.

The only assurance of income which Coleridge had to marry upon was an order from a Bristol publisher, Cottle, for a volume of poems. This volume, entitled *Juvenile Poems*, was soon forthcoming. In comparison with his later work, it contains nothing of note. The thirty guineas which it brought in, he attempted to eke out by preaching, lecturing, and publishing. To get subscribers for a projected periodical called *The Watchman*, Coleridge made a memorable tour of the midland counties, preaching on Sundays "as a tireless volunteer in a blue coat and white waistcoat," and charming everybody by his eloquence and earnestness.

Of Coleridge as a preacher, we get from young Hazlitt, who had on this occasion walked ten miles through the mud to hear him, a vivid account. He says:



Mr. Coleridge arose, and gave out his text, 'He departed again into a mountain, himself, alone.' As he gave out this text, his voice rose like a steam of distilled perfumes; and when he came to the two last words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and distinct, it seemed to me . . . as if the sound . . . might have floated in solemn silence through the universe. The preacher then launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind.

And, again, speaking of Coleridge's talk at this time:

His genius had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on forever, and you wished him to talk on forever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labor and effort, but as if the wings of imagination lifted him off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like a pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought.

In spite of poverty and domestic cares, this Bristol period was a happy one for Coleridge, especially the time which he spent in the neighboring village of Clevedon, in a little rose-covered cottage, close by the sea. It is sad to read, however, in one of his letters of this period, a sentence or two which prophesy the abyss of wretchedness ahead. He complains of violent neuralgia of the face, and says that he has "sopped the Cerberus" with a heavy dose of laudanum.

## IV

Early in 1797, Coleridge removed, with his wife and young baby, to a tiny cottage in the village of Nether Stowey, in the green Quantock hills, and a month later they were joined by Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, who took the neighboring mansion of Alfoxden. Coleridge was then twenty-five, and his brother poet only a little older. They had known each other but a few months when a mutual attraction brought them thus closely together. For Wordsworth, their companionship was to mean much; for Coleridge, it was to mean everything. Under the bracing influence of Wordsworth's large, original mind, supplemented by the quick sympathy and suggestiveness of Dorothy, and the quiet beauty of the Quantocks, Coleridge shot up suddenly into full poetic stature. In little more than a year, he wrote all the poems which place him among the immortals. This was the year of *Generieve*, *The Dark Ladie*, *Kubla Khan*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and the first part of *Christabel*,—truly, as it has been called, an *annus mirabilis*, a year of wonders. Of these *The Ancient Mariner* stands first as the one work of his life which he really completed; *Kubla Khan* has a more spacious music; *Christabel* has a more elusive and eerie mystery; but both of these are fragments.

*The Ancient Mariner* is as rounded as a gem, and the light that plays through it is unstained by a single flaw.

*The Ancient Mariner* was undertaken, singular to say, as a mere "pot-boiler." Coleridge and the Wordsworths had in mind a little autumn walking tour from Alfoxden over the Quantock hills to Watchet. To defray the expenses of the trip, some five pounds, they determined to compose together a poem to be sent to the *New Monthly Magazine*. Coleridge suggested, as a starting point, a dream which had been related to him by his friend Mr. Cruikshank, a dream "of a skeleton ship, with figures in it." To this Wordsworth added something he had just read in Shelvocke's *Voyages*, an account of the great albatrosses, with wings stretching twelve or thirteen feet from tip to tip, which Shelvocke had seen while doubling Cape Horn. Taking a hint from the same account, he suggested that a sailor should kill one of these birds, and that the tutelary spirits of the region should take vengeance on the murderer. Wordsworth also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men. Coleridge's imagination seized eagerly upon all these hints, and began to weave them into unity. The composition of the poem began at once, the two poets co-operating line by line. A few lines which stand in the completed poem were furnished by Wordsworth, especially the characteristic ones,

And listens like a three years' child,  
The mariner hath his will.

But they had not progressed far before their styles and manners of thought were seen to be so divergent that the idea of joint composition had to be abandoned. The task then naturally fell to Coleridge, because of the congeniality of the subject to his peculiar imagination. As The Ancient Mariner bade fair to take on dimension too large to allow it to be put to the modest use originally intended, it was proposed to make a little volume by adding to it other poems which the friends had in manuscript, or were contemplating. In the course of the following year, the volume appeared, under the title *Lyrical Ballads*. It is the most famous landmark in the history of the Romantic movement; in it the poetic ideals which had inspired the work of Cowper and Blake received for the first time full and clear expression.

What these ideals were may be summed up in the phrase "a return to nature. Fidelity to nature, and the use of the least artificial means possible in reproducing nature, constituted the most sincere among the many half-formed literary creeds of the day. But nature, rightly conceived, is two-sided. There is first the world of external fact, the visible world of men and things; and there is further the inner world of thought and imagination. It was a part of the philosophy



which lay back of the Romantic movement, that this inner world was just as "real," just as truly existent, and therefore just as worthy of being talked about, as the outer one,—perhaps more so. This double aspect of the Romantic school is illustrated by the contents of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth writes in simple language of simple incidents and simple people, though he does not fail to find a suggestion of strangeness and mystery in them as they are seen by the spiritual eye of the poet; in other words, he makes the usual appear strange simply by fastening our gaze intently upon it. Coleridge writes of fantastic, supernatural things, but also so simply, with so many concrete and exact details, that the world of imagination into which he leads us seems for the time the only real one. The *Lyrical Ballads* contained four poems by Coleridge, only a small portion of the whole; *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, however, has the place of honor at the beginning.

For one happy year, the poets were free to roam over the Quantock downs. We are told that Coleridge loved to compose while walking over uneven ground, or "breaking through straggling branches of copsewood," but that Wordsworth preferred a "straight gravel walk" for the purpose. Before we follow Coleridge hastily through the gloomy years ahead, let us see him as he appeared to his friends in his prime. Dorothy Wordsworth says in her journal:

At first, I thought him very plain, that is for about three minutes. He is pale, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth; longish, loose-growing, half-curling, rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes, you think no more of these.

And Hazlitt writes:

His forehead is broad and high, light, as if built of ivory, with large, projecting eyebrows; and his eyes rolled beneath them like a sea with darkened lustre.

In the same year in which the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared, Coleridge received the gift of a small permanent annuity, and was enabled to carry out a cherished plan for visiting Germany. Here he plunged at once into the transcendental philosophy of Kant and Schelling; and the rest of his life, so far as it had a unified purpose, was one long effort to interpret this philosophy to England. On his return, however, his first labor was a literary one, a translation of Schiller's drama, *Wallenstein*. He soon settled in the Lake country, where he shared a house with his brother-in-law, Southey. The dampness of the lake climate brought on his old neuralgic troubles, and as an escape from the intolerable pain, he resorted to opium. The history of the next ten years, when his marvelous powers should have been putting forth their finest product, is a heart-breaking succession of half-attempts and whole-failures, in news-

paper work, magazine editing, and lecturing; the fatal habit fastened itself more and more tightly upon him, sapping his will and manhood. At last, in 1814, he voluntarily put himself under the surveillance of a London physician, Dr. Gillman. He lived in the doctor's house from this time forth, and gradually struggled free from his bondage to the drug.

From the beginning of his residence with Dr. Gillman until his death, in 1834, Coleridge stood as a kind of prophet and seer to young men eager to penetrate into the arcana of transcendental philosophy. One more picture of him, as he appeared in old age to young Thomas Carlyle, will do to bear away:

Coleridge sat on the brow of Highgate Hill, in those years looking down on London and its smoke-tumult, like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battles; attracting toward him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there. . . . He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing by the 'reason' what the 'understanding' had been obliged to fling out as incredible. . . . A sublime man; who, alone in those dark days, had saved his crown of spiritual manhood: escaping from the black materialisms, and revolutionary deluges, with 'God, Freedom, Immortality' still his; a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer. But to the rising spirits of the young generation, he had this dusky, sublime character; and sat there as a kind of Magus, girt in mystery and enigma.

We may do well to bear in mind, in reading *The Ancient Mariner*, that it was from a brain of this order that the poem came. Though its beauty is sufficient for us, though as poetry, and poetry only, it must be taken, yet no harm can come from remembering that the man who has made us feel the wildness and the wonder of this dream-sea, was a metaphysician, at home among the immensities of abstract thought.

philosophy  
of being &  
of knowledge



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## CRITICAL COMMENT

### I

The "moral meaning" of *The Ancient Mariner* is plain, - too plain, perhaps, as Coleridge is himself reported to have said. The lesson it teaches is the duty of human kindness to "man and bird and beast." The mariner's wanton cruelty in shooting the albatross draws down upon him and his companions the wrath of the polar spirit. Those who have merely selfishly acquiesced in the crime, from a belief that the bird was of evil omen, are punished with death, but the Ancient Mariner, as the prime offender, is reserved for a more dreadful punishment. His setting apart for particular vengeance is typified by the dice-throwing on the deck of the skeleton ship, by which Life-in-Death wins him away from Death, and Death wins the rest of the crew. Thus far he has suffered only physical torture, but now spiritual torture succeeds. He cannot pray, for always a "wicked whisper" comes to

make his heart as dry as dust. Why? Because his heart is still full of hate. His shipmates, whom he afterwards speaks of lovingly as "the many men so beautiful," are now for him only rotting corpses on the rotting deck, with eyes that curse even in death. Suddenly, however, his soul is mystically touched. He sees the moon going softly up the sky, with a star or two in company, not spectral, or strange, but as if "the blue sky belonged to them" and there was a "silent joy at their arrival." With eyes thus opened by sympathy, he looks upon the water-snakes, which before have seemed to him slimy and loathsome, but which now as they play are clothed in beautiful light, as befits "God's creatures of the great calm." A spring of love gushes from his heart, and he blesses them for their beauty and their happiness. Instantly the horrid spell is broken, and to his soul comes the relief of prayer, to his body sleep and the gift of rain. Angelic spirits, sent into the bodies of the dead crew, take back the ship, with songs, to the fatherland, where the Mariner may <sup>atone for</sup> expiate his sin in prayer and ever-repeated confession.

Such is the spiritual meaning of the poem. It exists as a kind of undertone, giving to the poetry a certain religious depth and solemnity which it would not otherwise possess. It is not, however, to be made too much of. The delicate dream-world in which the poem moves, with its great pictures of night and morning, of arctic

and tropic seas; with its melodies of whispering keel, of sere sails rustling leafily, of dead throats singing spectral carols. — all this should not be passed by through zeal to get at the "meaning." The beauty is meaning enough. First of all, a reader must abandon himself to the illusion, put himself into the story, and try to realize its movement, to see its sights, to hear its sounds. He must give to it at least what Coleridge calls "that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith."

Having read the poem in this way, not once but many times, the student can begin to examine it more closely. Here, the notes, and the gloss\* printed in small type at the side of the verse, will be of aid. Until he has read and "felt" the poem for himself he should not pay any attention to them; afterward he should study them carefully in connection with the text. The notes are to be taken not as an exhaustive comment, but only as hints in an independent search for whatever of beauty or interest the poem can yield. The student will do well to jot down in the margin observations of his own to supplement them. Then, after a little interval, he should read the poem again, as a whole, and try to see it once more in its entirety, but with the added understanding which study has brought.

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\*This gloss, imitated from old writers, did not originally accompany the poem; it was added in a later edition.

## II

The simple ballad measure in which *The Ancient Mariner* is written presents no difficulties in reading. Attention to some of the metrical effects, however, and the means by which they are produced, will materially increase one's pleasure in the verse.

The following line may be taken as the normal one, from which all other types are variations:

˘The ship | ˘was chee'ered | ˘the har- | ˘bor clea'ed.

There is here a regular succession of unstressed and stressed syllables, each pair constituting a foot. This foot, in which the stress falls on the second syllable, is called iambic. Most of the feet which occur in the poem are of this sort. In some cases, however, the stress, instead of falling on the second syllable of the foot, is shifted to the first syllable, as in the first foot of each of the following lines:

We' were | ˘the first | ˘that ev- | ˘er burst  
In-to | ˘that si- | ˘lent sea.

The introduction of this foot, called trochaic, gives a distinctly different movement to the line; the music,

as well as the sense, would be destroyed by emphasizing the second syllable.

Again, the number of syllables in a given foot is sometimes not two, but three, as in the first foot of the line,

And the good | south wind | still blew | be-hind.

This foot, of two unstressed syllables, followed by one stressed syllable, is called anapestic. An anapest occupies no more time in reading than an iamb, for the weak syllables are pronounced very lightly. Hence, the movement of a line in which anapests occur is rapid.

Sometimes all three varieties of feet described above occur in a single line; as,

To and | fro we | were hur- | ried a-bout.

which is made up of two trochees, one iamb, and one anapest. The disturbed movement of the line corresponds with the idea which it expresses.

Variations also occur in the stanza form. The normal ballad stanza is of four lines, the first and third of four feet, unrhymed, the second and fourth of three feet, rhymed. In one or two cases, an extra syllable is added to the three-foot line; as,

With a short | un-eas- | y mo- | tion.



Medial rhymes sometimes occur in the four-foot lines; as,

"The game is *done!* I've won! I've *won!*"

Coleridge varies this stanza form to include five, six, and, in one case, nine lines, variously rhymed. In some cases, the variation is merely for variety; in others, it is intended to re-inforce the thought. Stanza 48, for example, strengthens the impression of suspense; stanza 12, the impression of hurry.

THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE





# THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER

## PART THE FIRST

### I

It is an ancient Mariner,  
And he stoppeth one of three.  
“By thy long gray beard and glittering eye,  
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?”

An ancient  
Mariner  
meeteth  
three Gal-  
lants bid-  
den to a  
wedding-  
feast, and  
detaineth  
one.

### II

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide,  
And I am next of kin;  
The guests are met, the feast is set:  
May'st hear the merry din.”

### III

He holds him with his skinny hand,  
“There was a ship,” quoth he  
“Hold off! unhand me, gray-beard loon!”  
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

### IV

He holds him with his glittering eye—  
The Wedding-Guest stood still,  
And listens like a three years' child:  
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wed-  
ding-Guest  
is spell-  
bound by  
the eye of  
the old sea-  
faring man,  
and con-  
strained to  
hear his  
tale.

## V

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:  
 He cannot choose but hear;  
 And thus spake on that ancient man,  
 The bright-eyed Mariner.

## VI

“The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,  
 Merrily did we drop  
 Below the kirk, below the hill,  
 Below the lighthouse top.

## VII

The Mar-  
 iner tells  
 how the  
 ship sailed  
 southward  
 with a good  
 wind and  
 fair weather  
 till it  
 reached the  
 Line.

The sun came up upon the left,  
 Out of the sea came he!  
 And he shone bright, and on the right  
 Went down into the sea.

## VIII

Higher and higher every day,  
 Till over the mast at noon—”  
 The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,  
 For he heard the loud bassoon.

## IX

The Wed-  
 ding-Guest  
 heareth the  
 bridal  
 music; but  
 the Mariner  
 continueth  
 his tale.

The bride hath paced into the hall,  
 Red as a rose is she;  
 Nodding their heads before her goes  
 The merry minstrelsy.

## X

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,  
 Yet he cannot choose but hear;  
 And thus spake on that ancient man,  
 The bright-eyed Mariner.

## XI

“And now the Storm-Blast came, and he  
 Was tyrannous and strong:  
 He struck with his o’ertaking wings,  
 And chased us south along.

The ship  
 drawn by  
 storm to-  
 ward the  
 south pole.

## XII

With sloping masts and dipping prow,  
 As who pursued with yell and blow  
 Still treads the shadow of his foe,  
 And forward bends his head,  
 The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,  
 And southward aye we fled.

## XIII

And now there came both mist and snow,  
 And it grew wondrous cold:  
 And ice, mast-high, came floating by,  
 As green as emerald.

## XIV

And through the drifts the snowy clifts  
 Did send a dismal sheen:  
 Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—  
 The ice was all between.

The land of  
 ice, and of  
 fearful  
 sounds,  
 where no  
 living thing  
 was to be  
 seen.

## XV

The ice was here, the ice was there,  
 The ice was all around;  
 It cracked and growled, and roared and howled  
 Like noises in a swound!

## XVI

Till a great  
 sea-bird,  
 called the  
 Albatross,  
 came  
 through the  
 snow-fog,  
 and was re-  
 ceived with  
 great joy  
 and hospi-  
 tality.

At length did cross an Albatross:  
 Thorough the fog it came;  
 As if it had been a Christian soul,  
 We hailed it in God's name.

## XVII

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,  
 And round and round it flew.  
 The ice did split with a thunder-fit;  
 The helmsman steered us through!

## XVIII

And lo! the  
 Albatross  
 proveth a  
 bird of good  
 omen, and  
 followeth  
 the ship as  
 it returned  
 northward,  
 through fog  
 and floating  
 ice.

And a good south wind sprung up behind;  
 The Albatross did follow,  
 And every day, for food or play,  
 Came to the mariners' hollo!

## XIX

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,  
 It perched for vespers nine;  
 Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,  
 Glimmered the white moon-shine."

## XX

“God save thee, ancient Mariner!

From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—

Why look’st thou so?”—“With my cross-bow

I shot the Albatross.”

The ancient  
Mariner  
inhospita-  
bly killeth  
the pious  
bird of good  
omen.

## PART THE SECOND

### XXI

"The Sun now rose upon the right:  
Out of the sea came he,  
Still hid in mist, and on the left  
Went down into the sea.

### XXII

And the good south wind still blew behind,  
But no sweet bird did follow,  
Nor any day, for food or play,  
Came to the mariners' hollo!

### XXIII

His ship-  
mates cry  
out against  
the ancient  
Mariner,  
for killing  
the bird of  
good luck.

And I had done a hellish thing,  
And it would work 'em woe:  
For all averred, I had killed the bird  
That made the breeze to blow.  
'Ah, wretch!' said they, 'the bird to slay,  
That made the breeze to blow!'

### XXIV

But when  
the fog  
cleared off,  
they justify  
the same,  
and thus  
make them-  
selves ac-  
complices  
in the crime.

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,  
The glorious Sun uprist:  
Then all averred, I had killed the bird  
That brought the fog and mist.  
'Twas right,' said they, 'such birds to slay.  
That bring the fog and mist.'

## XXV

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,  
 The furrow followed free;  
 We were the first that ever burst  
 Into that silent sea.

The fair  
 breeze con-  
 tinues; the  
 ship enters  
 the Pacific  
 Ocean and  
 sails north-  
 ward, even  
 till it  
 reaches the  
 Line.

## XXVI

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,  
 'Twas sad as sad could be;  
 And we did speak only to break  
 The silence of the sea!

The ship  
 hath been  
 suddenly  
 becalmed.

## XXVII

All in a hot and copper sky,  
 The bloody Sun, at noon,  
 Right up above the mast did stand,  
 No bigger than the Moon.

## XXVIII

Day after day, day after day,  
 We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
 As idle as a painted ship  
 Upon a painted ocean.

## XXIX

Water, water, everywhere,  
 And all the boards did shrink;  
 Water, water, everywhere,  
 Nor any drop to drink.

And the  
 Albatross  
 begins to be  
 avenged.

## XXX

The very deep did rot: O Christ!  
 That ever this should be!  
 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
 Upon the slimy sea

## XXXI

About, about, in reel and rout  
 The death-fires danced at night;  
 The water, like a witch's oils,  
 Burnt green, and blue, and white.

## XXXII

A spirit had  
 followed  
 them: one  
 of the in-  
 visible in-  
 habitants of  
 this planet,  
 neither de-

And some in dreams assured were  
 Of the spirit that plagued us so:  
 Nine fathom deep he had followed us  
 From the land of mist and snow.

parted souls nor angels: concerning whom the learned Jew Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus, may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more.

## XXXIII

And every tongue, through utter drought,  
 Was withered at the root;  
 We could not speak, no more than if  
 We had been choked with soot.

The ship-  
 mates in  
 their sore  
 distress  
 would fain  
 throw the  
 whole guilt  
 on the an-  
 cient Mar-  
 iner; in sign  
 whereof  
 they hang  
 the dead  
 sea-bird  
 round his  
 neck.

## XXXIV

Ah! well-a-day! what evil looks  
 Had I from old and young!  
 Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
 About my neck was hung.



## PART THE THIRD

### XXXV

There passed a weary time. Each throat  
Was parched, and glazed each eye.  
A weary time! a weary time!  
How glazed each weary eye!  
When looking westward, I beheld  
A something in the sky.

The ancient  
Mariner be-  
holdeth a  
sign in the  
element  
afar off.

### XXXVI

At first it seemed a little speck,  
And then it seemed a mist:  
It moved, and moved, and took at last  
A certain shape, I wist.

### XXXVII

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
And still it neared and neared:  
As if it dodged a water-sprite,  
It plunged and tacked and veered.

### XXXVIII

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
We could nor laugh nor wail;  
Through utter drought all dumb we stood!  
I bit my arm, I sucked the blood,  
And cried, A sail! a sail!

At its  
nearer ap-  
proach, it  
seemeth  
him to be a  
ship; and  
at a dear  
ransom  
he freeth  
his speech  
from the  
bonds of  
thirst.

## XXXIX

With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,  
 Agape they heard me call:  
 Gramercy! they for joy did grin,  
 And all at once their breath drew in,  
 As they were drinking all.

A flash of  
 joy;

## XL

And horror  
 follows. For  
 can it be a  
*ship* that  
 comes on-  
 ward with-  
 out wind or  
 tide?

See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!  
 Hither to work us weal;  
 Without a breeze, without a tide,  
 She steadies with upright keel!

## XLI

The western wave was all a-flame,  
 The day was well-nigh done!  
 Almost upon the western wave  
 Rested the broad bright Sun;  
 When that strange shape drove suddenly  
 Betwixt us and the Sun.

## XLII

It seemeth  
 him but the  
 skeleton of  
 a ship.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,  
 (Heaven's Mother send us grace!)  
 As if through a dungeon-grate he peered,  
 With broad and burning face.

## XLIII

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)  
 How fast she nears and nears!  
 Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,  
 Like restless gossameres?

## XLIV

Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun  
 Did peer, as through a grate?  
 And is that Woman all her crew?  
 Is that a Death? and are there two?  
 Is Death that Woman's mate?

And its ribs  
 are seen as  
 bars on the  
 face of the  
 setting Sun.  
 The Spec-  
 tre-Woman  
 and her  
 Death-  
 mate, and  
 no other on  
 board the  
 skeleton-  
 ship.

## XLV

Her lips were red, her looks were free,  
 Her locks were yellow as gold:  
 Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
 The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,  
 Who thicks man's blood with cold.

Like vessel,  
 like crew!

## XLVI

The naked hulk alongside came,  
 And the twain were casting dice;  
 'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'  
 Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

Death and  
 Life-in-  
 Death have  
 diced for  
 the ship's  
 crew, and  
 she (the  
 latter) win-  
 neth the  
 ancient  
 Mariner.

## XLVII

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:  
 At one stride comes the dark;  
 With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,  
 Off shot the spectre-bark.

No twilight  
 within the  
 courts of  
 the Sun.

## XLVIII

At the rising  
of the Moon,

We listened and looked sideways up!

Fear at my heart, as at a cup,

My life-blood seemed to sip!

The stars were dim, and thick the night,

The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed  
white;

From the sails the dew did drip—

Till clomb above the eastern bar

The horned Moon, with one bright star

Within the nether tip.

## XLIX

One after  
another.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,

Too quick for groan or sigh,

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,

And cursed me with his eye.

## L

His ship-  
mates drop  
down dead,

Four times fifty living men,

(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)

With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,

They dropped down one by one.

## LI

But Life-  
in-Death  
begins her  
work on the  
ancient  
Mariner.

The souls did from their bodies fly—

They fled to bliss or woe!

And every soul, it passed me by,

Like the whizz of my cross-bow!"

## PART THE FOURTH

### LII

"I fear thee ancient Mariner!  
I fear thy skinny hand!  
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,  
As is the ribbed sea-sand.

The Wedding-Guest  
feareth  
that a  
Spirit is  
talking to  
him;

### LIII

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,  
And thy skinny hand, so brown."—  
"Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!  
This body dropt not down.

But the an-  
cient Mar-  
iner assureth  
him of his  
bodily life,  
and pro-  
ceedeth to  
relate his  
horrible  
penance.

### LIV

Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea!  
And never a saint took pity on  
My soul in agony.

### LV

The many men, so beautiful!  
And they all dead did lie:  
And a thousand thousand slimy things  
Lived on; and so did I.

He despis-  
eth the  
creatures  
of the calm.

And envi-  
eth that  
they should  
live, and so  
many lie  
dead.

## LVI

I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away;  
I looked upon the rotting deck,  
And there the dead men lay.

## LVII

I looked to Heaven, and tried to pray;  
But or ever a prayer had gusht,  
A wicked whisper came, and made  
My heart as dry as dust.

## LVIII

I closed my lids, and kept them close,  
And the balls like pulses beat;  
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky  
Lay like a load on my weary eye,  
And the dead were at my feet.

## LIX

But the  
curse liveth  
for him in  
the eye of  
the dead  
men.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,  
Nor rot nor reek did they:  
The look with which they looked on me  
Had never passed away.

## LX

An orphan's curse would drag to Hell  
A spirit from on high;  
But oh! more horrible than that  
Is a curse in a dead man's eye!  
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,  
And yet I could not die.



## LXI

The moving Moon went up the sky,  
 And nowhere did abide:  
 Sottly she was going up,  
 And a star or two beside—

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest and their

## LXII

Her beams bemooked the sultry main,  
 Like April hoar-frost spread;  
 But where the ship's huge shadow lay,  
 The charmed water burnt away  
 A still and awful red.

native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

## LXIII

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
 I watched the water-snakes:  
 They moved in tracks of shining white,  
 And when they reared, the elfish light  
 Fell off in hoary flakes.

By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.

## LXIV

Within the shadow of the ship  
 I watched their rich attire:  
 Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
 They coiled and swam; and every track  
 Was a flash of golden fire.

## LXV

Their  
beauty and  
their happi-  
ness.

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware!  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware.

He blesseth  
them in his  
heart.

## LXVI

The spell  
begins to  
break.

The selfsame moment I could pray;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea.

## PART THE FIFTH

### LXVII

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,  
Beloved from pole to pole!  
To Mary Queen the praise be given!  
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,  
That slid into my soul.

### LXVIII

The silly buckets on the deck,  
That had so long remained,  
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;  
And when I awoke, it rained.

By grace of  
the holy  
Mother, the  
ancient  
Mariner is  
refreshed  
with rain.

### LXIX

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,  
My garments all were dank;  
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,  
And still my body drank.

### LXX

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:  
I was so light—almost  
I thought that I had died in sleep,  
And was a blessed ghost.

He heareth  
sounds,  
and seeth  
strange  
sights and  
commo-  
tions in the  
sky and the  
element.

## LXXI

And soon I heard a roaring wind:  
It did not come anear;  
But with its sound it shook the sails  
That were so thin and sere.

## LXXII

The upper air burst into life!  
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,  
To and fro they were hurried about;  
And to and fro, and in and out,  
The wan stars danced between.

## LXXIII

And the coming wind did roar more loud,  
And the sails did sigh like sedge;  
And the rain poured down from one black cloud,  
The Moon was at its edge.

## LXXIV

The thick black cloud was cleft, and still  
The Moon was at its side:  
Like waters shot from some high crag,  
The lightning fell with never a jag,  
A river steep and wide.

## LXXV

The loud wind never reached the ship,  
Yet now the ship moved on!  
Beneath the lightning and the Moon  
The dead men gave a groan.

The bodies  
of the ship's  
crew are  
inspired,  
and the  
ship moves  
on.

## LXXVI

They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,  
 Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;  
 It had been strange, even in a dream,  
 To have seen those dead men rise.

## LXXVII

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;  
 Yet never a breeze up-blew;  
 The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
 Where they were wont to do;  
 They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—  
 We were a ghastly crew.

## LXXVIII

The body of my brother's son  
 Stood by me, knee to knee:  
 The body and I pulled at one rope,  
 But he said naught to me."

## LXXIX

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!"  
 "Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!  
 'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,  
 Which to their corses came again,  
 But a troop of spirits blest:

But not by  
 the souls of  
 the men,  
 nor by  
 demons of  
 earth or  
 middle air,  
 but by a  
 blessed  
 troop of an-  
 gelic spirits,  
 sent down  
 by the invo-  
 cation of  
 the guard-  
 ian saint.

## LXXX

For when it dawned—they dropped their arms  
 And clustered round the mast;  
 Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,  
 And from their bodies passed.

## LXXXI

Around, around, flew each sweet sound,  
Then darted to the Sun;  
Slowly the sounds came back again,  
Now mixed, now one by one.

## LXXXII

Sometimes a-dropping from the sky  
I heard the sky-lark sing;  
Sometimes all little birds that are,  
How they seemed to fill the sea and air  
With their sweet jargoning!

## LXXXIII

And now 'twas like all instruments,  
Now like a lonely flute;  
And now it is an angel's song,  
That makes the heavens be mute.

## LXXXIV

It ceased; yet still the sails made on  
A pleasant noise till noon,  
A noise like of a hidden brook  
In the leafy month of June,  
That to the sleeping woods all night  
Singeth a quiet tune.

## LXXXV

Till noon we quietly sailed on,  
Yet never a breeze did breathe:  
Slowly and smoothly went the ship,  
Moved onward from beneath.



## LXXXVI

Under the keel nine fathom deep,  
 From the land of mist and snow,  
 The spirit slid: and it was he  
 That made the ship to go.  
 The sails at noon left off their tune,  
 And the ship stood still also.

The lone-  
 some Spirit  
 from the  
 south-pole  
 carries on  
 the ship as  
 far as the  
 Line, in  
 obedience  
 to the an-  
 gelic troop,  
 but still re-  
 quireth ven-  
 geance.

## LXXXVII

The Sun, right up above the mast,  
 Had fixed her to the ocean:  
 But in a minute she 'gan stir,  
 With a short uneasy motion—  
 Backwards and forwards half her length  
 With a short uneasy motion.

## LXXXVIII

Then like a pawing horse let go,  
 She made a sudden bound;  
 It flung the blood into my head,  
 And I fell down in a swoond.

## LXXXIX

How long in that same fit I lay,  
 I have not to declare;  
 But ere my living life returned,  
 I heard and in my soul discerned  
 Two voices in the air.

## XC

The Polar Spirit's fellow demons, the invisible inhabitants of the element, take part in his wrong; and two of them relate, one to the other, that penance long and heavy for the ancient Mariner hath been accorded to the Polar Spirit, who returneth southward.

'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?

By him who died on cross,  
With his cruel bow he laid full low,  
The harmless Albatross.

## XCI

The spirit who bideth by himself  
In the land of mist and snow,  
He loved the bird that loved the man  
Who shot him with his bow.'

## XCII

The other was a softer voice,  
As soft as honey-dew:  
Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done  
And penance more will do.'

## PART THE SIXTH

### XCIII

#### FIRST VOICE

'But tell me, tell me! speak again,  
Thy soft response renewing—  
What makes that ship drive on so fast?  
What is the Ocean doing?'

### XCIV

#### SECOND VOICE

'Still as a slave before his lord,  
The Ocean hath no blast;  
His great bright eye most silently  
Up to the Moon is cast—

### XCV

If he may know which way to go;  
For she guides him smooth or grim  
See, brother, see! how graciously  
She looketh down on him.'

### XCVI

#### FIRST VOICE

'But why drives on that ship so fast,  
Without or wave or wind?'

#### SECOND VOICE

'The air is cut away before,  
And closes from behind.

The Mar-  
iner hath  
been cast  
into a  
trance; for  
the angelic  
power caus-  
eth the ves-  
sel to drive  
northward  
faster than  
human life  
could en-  
dure.

## XCVII

Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!  
 Or we shall be belated:  
 For slow and slow that ship will go.  
 When the Mariner's trance is abated.'

## XCVIII

I woke, and we were sailing on  
 As in a gentle weather:  
 'Twas night, calm night, the Moon was high  
 The dead men stood together.

The super-  
 natural  
 motion is  
 retarded;  
 the Mariner  
 awakes, and  
 his penance  
 begins  
 anew.

## XCIX

All stood together on the deck,  
 For a charnel-dungeon fitter:  
 All fixed on me their stony eyes  
 That in the Moon did glitter.

## C

The pang, the curse, with which they died,  
 Had never passed away:  
 I could not draw my eyes from theirs,  
 Nor turn them up to pray.

## CI

And now this spell was snapt: once more  
 I viewed the Ocean green,  
 And looked far forth, yet little saw  
 Of what had else been seen—

The curse  
 is finally  
 expiated.

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## CII

Like one that on a lonesome road  
 Doth walk in fear and dread,  
 And having once turned round, walks on,  
 And turns no more his head;  
 Because he knows a frightful fiend  
 Doth close behind him tread.

## CIII

But soon there breathed a wind on me,  
 Nor sound nor motion made:  
 Its path was not upon the sea,  
 In ripple or in shade.

## CIV

It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek  
 Like a meadow-gale of spring—  
 It mingled strangely with my fears,  
 Yet it felt like a welcoming.

## CV

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,  
 Yet she sailed softly too:  
 Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—  
 On me alone it blew.

## CVI

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed  
 The light-house top I see?  
 Is this the hill? is this the kirk?  
 Is this mine own countree?

And the  
 ancient  
 Mariner be-  
 holdeth his  
 native  
 country.

## CVII

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,  
 And I with sobs did pray—  
 'O let me be awake, my God!  
 Or let me sleep alway.'

## CVIII

The harbour-bay was clear as glass,  
 So smoothly it was strewn!  
 And on the bay the moonlight lay,  
 And the shadow of the Moon.

## CIX

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,  
 That stands above the rock:  
 The moonlight steeped in silentness  
 The steady weathercock.

## CX

And the bay was white with silent light,  
 Till rising from the same,  
 Full many shapes, that shadows were,  
 In crimson colours came.

The angelic  
 spirits leave  
 the dead  
 bodies,

## CXI

A little distance from the prow  
 Those crimson shadows were:  
 I turned my eyes upon the deck—  
 Oh, Christ! what saw I there!

And appear  
 in their own  
 forms of  
 light



## CXII

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,  
And, by the holy rood!  
A man all light, a seraph-man,  
On every corse there stood.

## CXIII

This seraph-band, each waved his hand:  
It was a heavenly sight!  
They stood as signals to the land,  
Each one a lovely light;

## CXIV

This seraph-band, each waved his hand;  
No voice did they impart—  
No voice; but oh! the silence sank  
Like music on my heart.

## CXV

But soon I heard the dash of oars,  
I heard the Pilot's cheer;  
My head was turned perforce away,  
And I saw a boat appear.

## CXVI

The Pilot, and the Pilot's boy,  
I heard them coming fast:  
Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy  
The dead men could not blast.

## CXVII

I saw a third—I heard his voice:  
It is the Hermit good!  
He singeth loud his godly hymns  
That he makes in the wood.  
He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away  
The Albatross's blood.

## PART THE SEVENTH

### CXVIII

This Hermit good lives in that wood  
Which slopes down to the sea:  
How loudly his sweet voice he rears!  
He loves to talk with marineres  
That come from a far countree.

The Hermit  
of the wood

### CXIX

He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—  
He hath a cushion plump:  
It is the moss that wholly hides  
The rotted old oak-stump.

### CXX

The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,  
'Why this is strange, I trow!  
Where are those lights so many and fair,  
That signal made but now?'

### CXXI

Strange, by my faith!' the Hermit said—  
'And they answered not our cheer!  
The planks look warped! and see those sails  
How thin they are and sere!  
I never saw aught like to them,  
Unless perchance it were

Approach-  
eth the ship  
with won-  
der.

## CXXII

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag  
 My forest-brook along;  
 When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,  
 And the owlet whoops to the wolf below  
 That eats the she-wolf's young.'

## CXXIII

'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look'—  
 (The Pilot made reply)  
 'I am a-feared'—'Push on, push on!'  
 Said the Hermit cheerily.

## CXXIV

The boat came closer to the ship,  
 But I nor spake nor stirred;  
 The boat came close beneath the ship,  
 And straight a sound was heard.

## CXXV

The ship  
 suddenly  
 sinketh.

Under the water it rumbled on,  
 Still louder and more dread:  
 It reached the ship, it split the bay;  
 The ship went down like lead.

## CXXVI

The ancient  
 Mariner is  
 saved in the  
 Pilot's boat.

Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound,  
 Which sky and ocean smote,  
 Like one that hath been seven days drowned  
 My body lay afloat;  
 But swift as dreams, myself I found  
 Within the Pilot's boat.

## CXXVII

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,  
 The boat spun round and round;  
 And all was still, save that the hill  
 Was telling of the sound.

## CXXVIII

I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked  
 And fell down in a fit;  
 The Holy Hermit raised his eyes  
 And prayed where he did sit.

## CXXIX

I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,  
 Who now doth crazy go,  
 Laughed loud and long, and all the while  
 His eyes went to and fro.  
 'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,  
 The Devil knows how to row.'

## CXXX

And now, all in my own countree,  
 I stood on the firm land!  
 The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,  
 And scarcely he could stand.

## CXXXI

'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!'  
 The Hermit crossed his brow.  
 'Say quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say—  
 What manner of man art thou?'

The ancient  
 Mariner  
 earnestly  
 entreateth  
 the Hermit  
 to shrieve  
 him; and  
 the penance  
 of life falls  
 on him.

## CXXXII

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched  
 With a woful agony,  
 Which forced me to begin my tale;  
 And then it left me free.

## CXXXIII

Since then, at an uncertain hour,  
 That agony returns;  
 And till my ghastly tale is told,  
 This heart within me burns.

And ever  
 and anon  
 throughout  
 his future  
 life an  
 agony con-  
 straineth  
 him to  
 travel from  
 land to  
 land.

## CXXXIV

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
 I have strange power of speech;  
 That moment that his face I see,  
 I know the man that must hear me:  
 To him my tale I teach.

## CXXXV

What loud uproar bursts from that door!  
 The Wedding-Guests are there:  
 But in the garden-bower the bride  
 And bride-maids singing are;  
 And hark the little vesper bell.  
 Which biddeth me to prayer!

## CXXXVI

O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been  
 Alone on a wide wide sea:  
 So lonely 'twas, that God himself  
 Scarce seemed there to be.



## CXXXVII

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,  
 'Tis sweeter far to me,  
 To walk together to the kirk  
 With a goodly company!—

## CXXXVIII

To walk together to the kirk,  
 And all together pray,  
 While each to his great Father bends,  
 Old men, and babes, and loving friends,  
 And youths and maidens gay!

## CXXXIX

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell  
 To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!  
 He prayeth well, who loveth well  
 Both man and bird and beast.

And to  
 teach, by  
 his own ex-  
 ample, love  
 and rever-  
 ence to all  
 things that  
 God made  
 and loveth.

## CXL

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
 All things both great and small;  
 For the dear God who loveth us,  
 He made and loveth all."

## CXLI

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,  
 Whose beard with age is hoar,  
 Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest  
 Turned from the bridegroom's door.

## CXLII

He went like one that hath been stunned.  
And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder and a wiser man,  
He rose the morrow morn.

## NOTES

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Page 27, stanza I.—As in the old ballads, the speaker is not indicated, but suggested.

Page 27, stan. III.—This and stanzas VIII and IX set the Mariner's tale strongly in contrast with the wedding-feast. For a similar use of contrast see Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes*.

Page 27, stan. III.—What does the abruptness of the opening "There was a ship," show of the Mariner's state of mind? In the stanzas that follow, and throughout, notice the rapidity with which event follows event and picture picture; not a word is wasted. "Eftsoons" means "immediately."

Page 28, stan. VII, VIII.—A poetical way of saying that the ship sailed south until it reached the equator.

Page 28, stan. IX.—"Nodding" admirably suggests the contagious influence of the music.

Page 29, stan. XII.—The swiftness and persistence of pursuit is echoed in the closer crowding of the rhymes.

Page 29, stan. XIV, "Clifts."—Cliffs, the towering walls of the icebergs. "Drifts" here refers to driving or drifting mist.

Page 30, stan. XV, "Swound."—Swoon. Notice how the last line of the stanza makes suddenly remote and ghostly the realistic noises mentioned in the preceding line.

Page 30, stan. XIX, "Vespers nine."—Vespers, the twilight hour of prayer in the Catholic Church, may be used in a general sense, "vespers nine," meaning merely "nine days"; or in a more definite sense, showing that the bird, after sporting about the ship during the day, came at twilight to roost on the mast.

Page 31, stan. XX.—The change which comes over the Mariner's face at the recollection of his crime is suggested by the frightened exclamation of his hearer. Notice that "suggestion" of this sort is employed throughout, in place of plain statement.

Page 32, stan. XXI, "Upon the right."—The ship has turned northward.

Page 32, stan. XXIV, "Then all averred," etc.—Do not emphasize "killed" or "bird" as the metre tempts you to do. The meaning is, "All averred that the bird I killed had brought the fog," etc.

Page 33, stan. XXV.—The suddenness of the apparition is emphasized by the powerful word "burst."

Page 33, stan. XXVII.—The size of the sun is significant. Dry air, rarified by heat, allows objects to be seen in their proper size, not enlarged by refraction.

Page 36, stan. XXXIX, "Grin."—Suggests the drawn muscles, distorted by thirst.

Page 36, stan. XLI.—"Drove" is very graphic and true here. As the boat moved along the blank horizon, its swiftness would not be noticed, but when measured against the stationary disc of the sun, it would become suddenly apparent.

Page 37, stan. XLIV.—The following stanza describing the "woman's mate," Death, was omitted after the first edition:

His bones were black with many a crack,  
All bare and black, I ween;  
Jet black and bare, save where with rust  
Of mouldy damp and charnel crust  
They're patched with purple and green.

Can you see any reason for the omission?

Page 37, stan. XLVII (Gloss).—The "courts of the Sun" are the tropics; the sudden coming on of a tropical night

given in two phrases unforgettably. The whisper of the vanishing keel increases the sense of tropical stillness.

Page 38, stan. L, "Thump, hump."—Notice the fearless use of the most commonplace, even vulgar words for poetic ends.

Page 40, stan. LVIII.—The long-drawn third line gives an impression of weariness, which is increased by retarding the stanza with an extra line and rhyme-word.

Page 43, stan. LXVIII, "Silly."—Useless, because of the truth. Look up in the dictionary the various meanings which the word has had.

Page 44, stan. LXXIV, "Like waters shot," etc.—The figure, as applied to "sheet lightning," is very bold. Does it seem to you justifiable?

Page 46, stan. LXXXII.—The last syllable of "jargoning" should not be stressed, but pronounced lightly as in prose. The effect of rhyme thus produced by an unstressed syllable matching one of heavy stress is very delicate and beautiful.

Page 46, stan. LXXXII, LXXXIII, LXXXIV.—Notice how the accumulating details strengthen the sense of quietness and blessing.

Page 47, stan. LXXXVII.—The extra syllable of the rhymes, and the shifted accents in lines 3 and 5, suggest uneasiness. The repetition of line 4 suggests the monotonous back and fill of the ship.

Page 49, stan. XCV, "If he may know."—In order that he may know, to see if he can discover.

Page 51, stan. CVI.—Notice that the lighthouse, hill, and church reappear in the inverse order of their disappearance. It is in little details like this that the exactness of the poet's imagination comes out.

Page 52, stan. CVII, "Let me be awake."—Let me prove to be awake, let this prove to be no dream.

Page 53, stan. CXII.—The shapes which the Mariner sees are the reflections upon the water, or perhaps upon the moonlit air, of the seraph-men or angelic spirits, who now emerge from the dead bodies of the sailors on the deck, and stand above them. The Mariner is standing by the rail, looking out to shore, and can see only by reflection what takes place on deck.

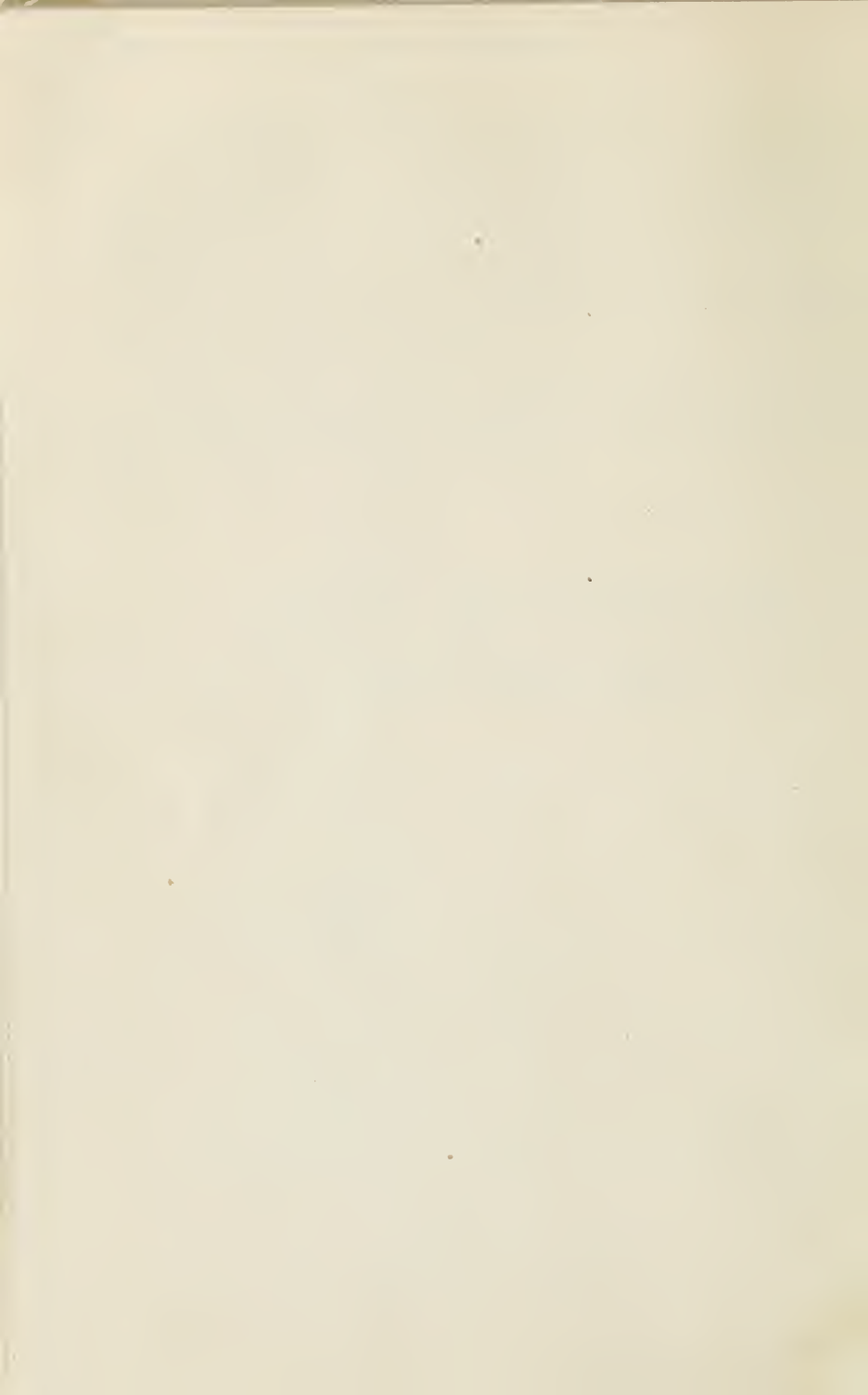
Page 58, stan. CXXXV.—Note the reversion to the contrast used in the first few stanzas.

Page 60, stan. CXLII, "Of sense forlorn."—An expansion of the idea given above in "stunned"; it means "deprived of sensibility or power of feeling sensations."

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL





## INTRODUCTION

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*The Vision of Sir Launfal* was written in 1848, the year of Lowell's greatest poetical activity. He was twenty-nine years old, and had been graduated from Harvard College ten years before. During his college course, he had lived a thoroughly independent intellectual life, making up for his neglect of the regular routine of study by eager reading of imaginative literature, especially poetry and drama. After graduation he had tried his hand at the law, and for a short time at business, but the bent of his nature was already so strongly toward a literary life that he was unhappy until he had put everything else behind him, and launched into the publication of a magazine, called the *Pioneer*. The magazine had been short-lived, owing partly to the inexperience of its editors, partly to the fact that the literary standard which they set up was too high for the reading public of the day. After the collapse of the *Pioneer*, Lowell had bravely resolved to take the full consequences of his abandonment of the law, and trust to his pen for support. The determination

required courage, for his father had recently lost fortune, and he was himself eager to marry. He had taken up the hazardous pursuit of letters, however, with the lighthearted confidence characteristic of him; his letters of this period are full of fine enthusiasm and buoyant self-belief. By 1844 his contributions to the magazines had begun to bring in a sufficient income to enable him to marry the woman whose fine gifts of mind and heart ripened everything that was best in his nature. The name of Maria White occurs everywhere in his letters of this time, and is always mentioned with a kind of reverent ecstasy which shows how powerful her influence had been in stirring the mystical depths of his heart, and preparing it for its mission of song.

He had taken his bride to the old family mansion of Elmwood, where he had been born, and where he was to die. With the exception of his residence abroad as minister to Spain and to England, Lowell's home throughout his life was at Elmwood. The house is still one of the interesting sights of Cambridge. It stands back from the encroachment of modern houses and street-car lines, in a shelter of splendid English elms, and there is a flavor of more generous days in its broad lines, its small-paned windows, and its rich colors of white and yellow. In its nursery, Lowell's mother had sung to him strange old Scotch and English ballads, one of which, the ballad of Sir Patrick Spens, she liked

to think had an ancestor of her own for its hero.\* In the south front room of the upper story, Lowell had made his "den" as a boy. The walls were lined with books and old engravings; in their midst, a panel brought from the house of one of the seventeenth century Lowells, in Newbury, Massachusetts, bore this inscription in Latin: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity,"—a legend which seems almost to sum up Lowell's own character and creed. From the upper windows there was a view over the trees to Brighton, Brookline, and Roxbury, with the great gilded dome of the State House on the left, and on the right, the silver coil of the Charles winding through the marshes, which in summer were a vivid green, changing in the wind like silk, and in autumn were gorgeous with ochreous reds and sombre purples.

Here, in the midst of beautiful, familiar scenes, with the inspiration of his wife and his many friends urging him to his best, Lowell put forth his first really mature work. He had already published two small volumes of poetry, but he was conscious of much more noble powers than had yet found expression. In 1848 he wrote and published the two works which have taken deepest hold upon popular affection, the *Biglow Papers*, and *The Vision of Sir Launfal*. The first represents him in his quality of humorist, a quality in him so genu-

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\*Her maiden name was Spence.

ine and racy that Thackeray lamented that he should ever have abandoned the humorous vein for more "serious" efforts. The second shows his purely poetic power if not in its highest, at least in its most genial and lovable manifestation. *Sir Launfal* has come to be considered Lowell's typical poem. It is known to thousands who have never heard of *The Cathedral* or the *Commemorative Ode*; and to whom the important critical writings of the author's maturer manhood are no more than an abstraction. There are some good reasons to entitle it to this pre-eminence.

## II

The poem is founded upon a tradition of great antiquity, about which many poets, from the romancers of the middle ages, Chretien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, to Wagner and Tennyson, have woven their fancies. According to this tradition, the San Greal, or Holy Grail, was a cup made of one great sapphire, out of which Jesus drank wine, at the Last Supper with his disciples. It was brought by Joseph of Arimathea into England, where for many years it was preserved in his family, visited by pilgrims, and adored as a holy relic. One obligation rested upon those to whose keeping the Grail was entrusted; they must be chaste and pure in heart. One of the descendants of Joseph broke his vow of chastity, and the Grail disappeared. From this time on it was sought for through the whole world by the knights of the Round Table, until it was at last found by the stainless Galahad.

For the purposes of his poem, Lowell has, as he says, "enlarged the circle of competition in search of the miraculous cup in such a manner as to include, not only other persons than the heroes of the Round Table, but also

a period of time subsequent to the supposed date of Arthur's reign." He has also enlarged the moral meaning of the San Greal story, by making, not chastity, but charity and humble brotherly love the condition of success in the search. Sir Launfal, in his vision, starts upon the quest with his heart full of high emprise, to be sure, but also full of youthful pride and intolerance. As he dashes from his castle gate, clad in shining mail into the light and fragrance of the summer morning, the beggar crouching at the gate shocks his dainty senses. For as yet he sees only with the bodily eye. A piece of gold flung in scorn is the only answer he can make to a fellow-creature's appeal. But in the long years of his quest, his vision is purged and spiritualized by suffering; his eyes are bathed in the "euphrasy and rue" of human sympathy. When he returns, an old, worn man, to find his earldom seized by another, and to be himself driven from his palace gate into the shelterless storm, he sees no longer with the bodily eye the husks of things, but with the eye of the spirit their abiding essences. Beneath the rags and sores of the leper, he sees a brother made in the image of God, and shares with him his crust and his draught of water. Then suddenly before his astonished eyes, the leper rises and stands radiant, the very Christ in whose name the alms was given, and the wooden bowl with which he had dipped the water from the frozen stream sways before



him as a chalice of dazzling sapphire, filled with his Lord's blood. The Holy Grail, that he has sought through the ends of the earth, he finds at his own palace gate, because there for the first time he has been perfect in charity.

The lesson is a fine one, worthy of the fine moral nature and fine enthusiasm for the things of the spirit, which Lowell inherited from his Puritan ancestors. It is doubtless in large measure because of this simple and eloquent teaching that the poem has taken its deep hold upon American readers. Our race has, in all ages, been distinguished by an intense interest in ethical ideals, in questions of creed and conduct. Lowell was, by nature and antecedents, fitted to appeal to such an interest. He came from a long line of Puritan enthusiasts, men of light and leading in their day. Even in youth, his letters are studded with reflections upon the deeper moral meanings of life, and here and there we light upon a sentence of real spiritual wisdom. Writing to his friend J. B. Loring, in 1842, he says:

You say that life seems to be a struggle after nothing in particular. But you are wrong. It is a struggle after the peaceful home of the soul in a natural and loving state of life. Men are mostly unconscious of the object of their struggle, but it is always connected in some way with this.

His morality was never mere ethics. There was always in it a tinge of that more mysterious and exalted

state of mind which we call religion. To the same friend, he writes:

I was at Mary's, and happening to say something of the presence of spirits (of whom, I said, I was often dimly aware), Mr. Putnam entered into an argument with me on spiritual matters. As I was speaking, the whole system rose up before me like a vague Destiny looming from the abyss. I never before so clearly felt the spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to be full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of something, I knew not what.

And again he says: "It would have taken a very little to make a St. Francis\* of me." *The Vision of Sir Launfal* stands by right as Lowell's typical poem, because it unites these two strains of moral and religious feeling. On one side, it teaches the simple human duties of sympathy and humility, on the other, it gives a hint of the mystical kinship between God and man, the union of Christ with the leper, which is the core of religion. Sir Launfal, sharing his crust with the leper, is doing exactly what St. Francis would have done; and the poet has put his heart into the creation because he feels a peculiar kinship with it.

But all this, excellent as it is, would never, of itself, make a poem. There must be added to the moral

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\*St. Francis of Assisi in 1225 founded the order of the Franciscan or Barefoot friars, in protest against the riches and corruption of the existing monastic orders.

idea something which, for want of a better word, we call beauty, and this beauty must work itself out in two ways at least—in picture and in melody. These are the two things without which poetry cannot exist; the poet must make us see his thought, not as an abstraction, but as a reality glowing with color and movement; and he must do this through the medium of musical language.

As regards the first of these prerequisites of poetry, there can be no doubt in the case of *Sir Launfal*. It is full of pictures too vivid to be easily forgotten. The summer landscape of the first prelude, where June has pitched her green tents round about the frowning gray walls and towers of Sir Launfal's castle; the young knight, girt in gilded armor, flashing across the draw-bridge into the dawn, while the beggar crouches in a corner of the portal; the elfin palace of arches and colonnades and delicate domes which the winter brook builds for itself, these, and many other pictures, will linger in a reader's mind after the story and its "meaning" have been forgotten. The descriptions of nature in the poem gain vividness from the fact that, in writing them, the poet had, in Wordsworth's phrase, "his eye on the object." In a letter to C. F. Briggs, he says:

Last night I walked to Watertown over the snow, with the new moon before me. Orion was rising before me, the stillness of the fields around me was delicious, broken only by the tinkle

of a little brook which runs too swiftly for Frost to catch. My picture of the brook in *Sir Launfal* was drawn from it.

But whether drawn from actual scenes or from fancy, the pictures of the poem are abundant and satisfying. It embodies its thought continually in picture, and is in this respect a true poem.

With respect to the second requisite of all poetry, melody, *Sir Launfal* cannot be so confidently praised. Lowell had a stout word to say in his own defense against the charge of harsh versifying. He says:

I may be a bad poet, (I don't mean to say I *think* I am), but I *am* a good versifier. I write with far more ease in verse than I do in prose. There is not a rough verse in my book which is not intentional. I don't believe the man ever lived who put more *conscience* into his verse than I do.

All this we can agree to heartily, while denying to Lowell's verse the highest quality of music, such as one finds, for example, in Shelley and Coleridge. Some passages of *Sir Launfal* are musically effective; to take random examples, the joyous movement and reiteration of rhyme in the sixth stanza of the first prelude, and even more eminently so the slow, dreamy movement of the opening stanza. But there are, on the other hand, many lines which do not "read themselves." Comparatively few persons are sensitive to the more delicate

effects of metre, and to bring these effects to the notice of others not so sensitive would require more space than is available here. But the student will do well to contrast the movement of a few lines, such as,

For other couriers we should not lack,

or,

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,

with

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,

and

First lets his fingers wander as they list,

And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay.

It would be well, too, to read the poem aloud, together with some poem noteworthy for its melody, such as Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* or Keats's *Eve of St. Agnes*, and to attempt to note the comparative effects as regards the mere pleasantness of sound of the verse.

Another consideration which must enter into our judgment of a poem, besides its picturesqueness and its melody, is its form. The greatest poems have a shape, an outline, so to speak, which is in itself beautiful. There is no redundancy about them anywhere; they are clean-cut and balanced, part to part, as a fine statue or



a fine building. Will *Sir Launfal* stand this test? Are the opening stanzas of moral reflection really in place in a poem which conveys its meaning perfectly without them? Is the famous rhapsody beginning, "And what is so rare as a day in June?" in spite of its beauty, anything but a beautiful excrescence? Both these passages are, of course, excused by the opening stanza, where the poet compares himself with the musician dreamily extemporizing in various keys until he is drawn into his main theme; and we must bear in mind too that the poem was composed at high speed, in a space of about forty-eight hours, during which Lowell scarcely ate or slept. But after all is the excuse sufficient? Is the poet not really a composer, rather than an improviser, subject, therefore, to more stringent laws of form?

It can be urged, however, that this rhapsody on June weather merges naturally into the description of the summer landscape surrounding the old gray castle and helps to bring out the symbolism of the forces of natural joy and common happiness besieging the force of dark pride and selfishness. But, even if we grant this, does it apply to the second prelude? The contrast here is between the warmth and Christmas glee inside the castle, and the wintry desolation without; yet the picture of the elfin palace built by the brook is the reverse of desolate. We must admit, therefore, that the poem proper is adorned with extraneous ornament; it has no

a pure outline, nor pure proportions, such as may be seen, for example, in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

But observation of these particulars in which *Sir Launjal* comes short of the highest, will only make clearer, it is to be hoped, the number and excellence of the beauties it possesses. If it has not the pure outline of a statue, perhaps it is because it has the abundant bloom and luxuriant leafage of a plant; let us enjoy it for what it is, after once seeing clearly what it is not.





THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL



# The Vision of Sir Launfal

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## PRELUDE TO PART FIRST

Over his keys the musing organist,  
Beginning doubtfully and far away,  
First lets his fingers wander as they list,  
And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay;  
5 Then, as the touch of his loved instrument  
Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his theme,  
First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent  
Along the wavering vista of his dream.

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Not only around our infancy  
10 Doth heaven with all its splendors lie;  
Daily, with souls that cringe and plot,  
We Sinais climb and know it not.  
Over our manhood bend the skies;  
Against our fallen and traitor lives  
15 The great winds utter prophesies;  
With our faint hearts the mountain strives;  
Its arms outstretched, the Druid wood  
Waits with its benedicite;

And to our age's drowsy blood  
Still shouts the inspiring sea.  
Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us;  
The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in.  
The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,  
We bargain for the graves we lie in;  
At the Devil's booth are all things sold,  
Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;  
For a cap and bells our lives we pay,  
Bubbles we buy with a whole soul's tasking:  
'Tis heaven alone that is given away,  
'Tis only God may be had for the asking;  
No price is set on the lavish summer;  
June may be had by the poorest comer.

And what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then, if ever, come perfect days;  
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays:  
Whether we look, or whether we listen,  
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten;  
Every clod feels a stir of might,  
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,  
And, grasping blindly above it for light,  
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers;  
The flush of life may well be seen  
Thrilling back over hills and valleys;  
The cowslip startles in meadows green.  
The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice.

And there's never a leaf or a blade too mean  
 To be some happy creature's palace;  
 The little bird sits at his door in the sun,  
 A Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,  
 5 And lets his illumined being o'errun  
 With the deluge of summer it receives;  
 His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,  
 And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings;  
 He sings to the wide world, and she to her nest,—  
 10 In the nice ear of Nature which song is the best?

1225 - A  
 1226 - B  
 A  
 R

Now is the high-tide of the year,  
 And whatever of life hath ebbed away  
 Comes flooding back with a ripply cheer  
 Into every bare inlet and creek and bay;  
 15 Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,  
 We are happy now because God wills it;  
 No matter how barren the pass may have been,  
 'Tis enough for us now that the leaves are green;  
 We sit in the warm shade and feel right well  
 20 How the sap creeps up and the blossoms swell;  
 We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing  
 That skies are clear and grass is growing;  
 The breeze comes whispering in our ear  
 That dandelions are blossoming near,  
 25 That maize has sprouted, that streams are flowing,  
 That the river is bluer than the sky,  
 That the robin is plastering his house hard by;

And if the breeze kept the good news back,  
For other couriers we should not lack;

We could guess it all by yon heifer's lowing,—  
And hark! how clear bold chanticleer,  
Warmed with the new wine of the year,  
Tells all in his lusty crowing!

Joy comes, grief goes, we know not how;  
Everything is happy now,

Everything is upward striving;  
'Tis as easy now for the heart to be true  
As for grass to be green or skies to be blue.—

'Tis the natural way of living:  
Who knows whither the clouds have fled?

In the unscarred heaven they leave no wake;  
And the eyes forget the tears they have shed,

The heart forgets its sorrow and ache;  
The soul partakes the season's youth,

And the sulphurous rifts of passion and woe  
Lie deep 'neath a silence pure and smooth,

Like burnt-out craters healed with snow.

What wonder if Sir Launfal now  
Remembered the keeping of his vow?



## PART FIRST

## I

"My golden spurs now bring to me,  
 And bring to me my richest mail,  
 For to-morrow I go over land and sea  
 In search of the Holy Grail;  
 5 Shall never a bed for me be spread,  
 Nor shall a pillow be under my head,  
 Till I begin my vow to keep;  
 Here on the rushes will I sleep,  
 And perchance there may come a vision true  
 10 Ere day create the world anew."  
 Slowly Sir Launfal's eyes grew dim,  
 Slumber fell like a cloud on him,  
 And into his soul the vision flew.

## II

The crows flapped over by twos and threes,  
 15 In the pool drowsed the cattle up to their knees  
 The little birds sang as if it were  
 The one day of summer in all the year,  
 And the very leaves seemed to sing on the trees;  
 The castle alone in the landscape lay

Like an outpost of winter, dull and gray;  
'Twas the proudest hall in the North Countree,  
And never its gates might opened be,  
Save to lord or lady of high degree;  
Summer besieged it on every side,  
But the churlish stone her assaults defied;  
She could not scale the chilly wall,  
Though round it for leagues her pavilions tall  
Stretched left and right,  
Over the hills and out of sight;  
    Green and broad was every tent,  
    And out of each a murmur went  
Till the breeze fell off at night.

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### III

The drawbridge dropped with a surly clang.  
And through the dark arch a charger sprang,  
Bearing Sir Launfal, the maiden knight,  
In his gilded mail, that flamed so bright  
It seemed the dark castle had gathered all  
Those shafts the fierce sun had shot over its wall  
    In his siege of three hundred summers long,  
And binding them all in one blazing sheaf,  
    Had cast them forth: so, young and strong,  
And lightsome as a locust-leaf,  
Sir Launfal flashed forth in his unscarred mail,  
To seek in all climes for the Holy Grail.

## IV

It was morning on hill and stream and tree,  
And morning in the young knight's heart;  
Only the castle moodily  
Rebuffed the gifts of the sunshine free,  
5 And gloomed by itself apart;  
The season brimmed all other things up  
Full as the rain fills the pitcher-plant's cup.

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## V

As Sir Launfal made morn through the darksome gate,  
10 He was 'ware of a leper, crouched by the same,  
Who begged with his hand and moaned as he sate;  
And a loathing over Sir Launfal came;  
The sunshine went out of his soul with a thrill,  
The flesh 'neath his armor did shrink and crawl,  
15 And midway its leap his heart stood still  
Like a frozen waterfall;  
For this man, so foul and bent of stature,  
Rasped harshly against his dainty nature,  
20 And seemed the one blot on the summer morn,—  
So he tossed him a piece of gold in scorn.

## VI

The leper raised not the gold from the dust:

“Better to me the poor man's crust,

Better the blessing of the poor,

Though I turn me empty from his door;

That is no true alms which the hand can hold;

He gives nothing but worthless gold

Who gives from a sense of duty;

But he who gives a slender mite,

And gives to that which is out of sight.

That thread of the all-sustaining Beauty

Which runs through all and doth all unite,—

The hand cannot clasp the whole of his alms,

The heart outstretches its eager palms.

For a god goes with it and makes it store

To the soul that was starving in darkness before.”

## PRELUDE TO PART SECOND

Down swept the chill wind from the mountain peak  
From the snow five thousand summers old;  
On open wold and hill-top bleak  
It had gathered all the cold,  
5 And whirled it like sleet on the wanderer's cheek:  
It carried a shiver everywhere  
From the unleaved boughs and pastures bare;  
The little brook heard it and built a roof  
'Neath which he could house him, winter-proof;  
10 All night by the white stars' frosty gleams  
He groined his arches and matched his beams;  
Slender and clear were his crystal spars  
As the lashes of light that trim the stars:  
He sculptured every summer delight  
15 In his halls and chambers out of sight;  
Sometimes his tinkling waters slipt  
Down through a frost-leaved forest-crypt,  
Long, sparkling aisles of steel-stemmed trees  
Bending to counterfeit a breeze;  
20 Sometimes the roof no fretwork knew  
But silvery mosses that downward grew;  
Sometimes it was carved in sharp relief  
With quaint arabesques of ice-fern leaf;  
Sometimes it was simply smooth and clear

For the gladness of heaven to shine through, and here  
He had caught the nodding bulrush-tops  
And hung them thickly with diamond drops,  
Which crystallised the beams of moon and sun,  
And made a star of every one:  
No mortal builder's most rare device  
Could match this winter-palace of ice:  
'Twas as if every image that mirrored lay  
In his depths serene through the summer day,  
Each fitting shadow of earth and sky,  
Lest the happy model should be lost,  
Had been mimicked in fairy masonry  
By the elfin builders of the frost.

Within the hall are song and laughter,  
The cheeks of Christmas glow red and jolly,  
And sprouting is every corbel and rafter  
With lightsome green of ivy and holly;  
Through the deep gulf of the chimney wide  
Wallows the Yule-log's roaring tide;  
The broad flame-pennons droop and flap  
And belly and tug as a flag in the wind;  
Like a locust shrills the imprisoned sap,  
Hunted to death in its galleries blind;  
And swift little troops of silent sparks,  
Now pausing, now scattering away as in fear,  
Go threading the soot-forest's tangled darks  
Like herds of startled deer.

But the wind without was eager and sharp,  
Of Sir Launfal's gray hair it makes a harp,  
And rattles and wrings  
The icy strings,

- 5 Singing, in dreary monotone,  
A Christmas carol of its own,  
Whose burden still, as he might guess,  
Was—"Shelterless, shelterless, shelterless!"

- The voice of the seneschal flared like a torch  
10 As he shouted the wanderer away from the porch,  
And he sat in the gateway and saw all night  
The great hall-fire, so cheery and bold,  
Through the window-slits of the castle old,  
Build out its piers of ruddy light  
15 Against the drift of the cold.



## PART SECOND.

### I

There was never a leaf on bush or tree,  
The bare boughs rattled shudderingly;  
The river was dumb and could not speak,

For the frost's swift shuttles its shroud had spun;  
A single crow on the tree-top bleak

From his shining feathers shed off the cold sun;  
Again it was morning, but shrunk and cold,  
As if her veins were sapless and old  
And she rose up decrepitly  
For a last dim look at earth and sea.

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### II

Sir Launfal turned from his own hard gate,  
For another heir in his earldom sate;  
An old, bent man, worn out and frail,  
He came back from seeking the Holy Grail;  
Little he recked of his earldom's loss.  
No more on his surcoat was blazoned the cross,  
But deep in his soul the sign he wore,  
The badge of the suffering and the poor.

## III

Sir Launfal's raiment thin and spare  
Was idle mail 'gainst the barbed air,  
For it was just at the Christmas time;  
So he mused, as he sat, of a sunnier clime,  
5 And sought for a shelter from cold and snow  
In the light and warmth of long ago;  
He sees the snake-like caravan crawl  
O'er the edge of the desert, black and small,  
Then nearer and nearer, till, one by one,  
10 He can count the camels in the sun,  
As over the red-hot sands they pass  
To where, in its slender necklace of grass,  
The little spring laughed and leapt in the shade,  
And with its own self like an infant played,  
15 And waved its signal of palms.

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## IV

"For Christ's sweet sake, I beg an alms";—  
The happy camels may reach the spring,  
But Sir Launfal sees naught save the grewsome thing,  
20 The leper, lank as the rain-blanchèd bone,  
That cowered beside him, a thing as lone  
And white as the ice-isles of Northern seas,  
In the desolate horror of his disease.

## V

And Sir Launfal said,—“I behold in thee  
An image of Him who died on the tree;  
Thou also hast had thy crown of thorns,—  
Thou also hast had the world’s buffets and scorns,—  
And to thy life were not denied  
The wounds in the hands and feet and side:  
Mild Mary’s Son, acknowledge me;  
Behold, through him, I give to thee!”

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## VI

Then the soul of the leper stood up in his eyes  
And looked at Sir Launfal, and straightway he  
Remembered in what a haughtier guise  
He had flung an alms to leprosie,  
When he caged his young life up in gilded mail  
And set forth in search of the Holy Grail.  
The heart within him was ashes and dust;  
He parted in twain his single crust,  
He broke the ice on the streamlet’s brink,  
And gave the leper to eat and drink;  
’Twas a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread,  
’Twas water out of a wooden bowl,—  
Yet with fine wheaten bread was the leper fed,  
And ’twas red wine he drank with his thirsty soul.

## VII

As Sir Launfal mused with a downcast face,  
A light shone round about the place;  
The leper no longer crouched at his side,  
But stood before him glorified,  
5 Shining and tall and fair and straight  
As the pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate,—  
Himself the Gate whereby men can  
Enter the temple of God in Man.

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## VIII

His words were shed softer than leaves from the pine,  
0 And they fell on Sir Launfal as snows on the brine,  
That mingle their softness and quiet in one  
With the shaggy unrest they float down upon;  
And the voice that was calmer than silence said,  
“Lo, it is I, be not afraid!  
5 In many climes, without avail,  
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;  
Behold, it is here,—this cup which thou  
Didst fill at the streamlet for me but now;  
This crust is my body broken for thee,  
0 This water His blood that died on the tree;  
The Holy Supper is kept, indeed,  
In whatso we share with another's need;  
Not what we give, but what we share,

For the gift without the giver is bare;  
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—  
Himself, his hungering neighbor, and me.”

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## IX

Sir Launfal awoke as from a swoond:  
“The Grail in my castle here is found!  
Hang my idle armor up on the wall,  
Let it be the spider’s banquet-hall;  
He must be fenced with stronger mail  
Who would seek and find the Holy Grail.”

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## X

The castle gate stands open now,  
And the wanderer is welcome to the hall  
As the hangbird is to the elm-tree bough;  
No longer scowl the turrets tall,  
The Summer’s long siege at last is o’er;  
When the first poor outcast went in at the door,  
She entered with him in disguise,  
And mastered the fortress by surprise;  
There is no spot she loves so well on ground.  
She lingers and smiles there the whole year round;  
The meanest serf on Sir Launfal’s land  
Has hall and bower at his command;  
And there’s no poor man in the North Countree  
But is lord of the earldom as much as he.

## NOTES

### PRELUDE TO PART I

Page 83, first stanza.—Can you discover why this stanza is more pleasing to the ear than most of the others? What use is made of alliteration? Compare with this stanza Browning's poem *Abt Vogler*, for a more elaborate working out of imagery suggested by music.

Page 83, lines 9-10.—An allusion to Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, particularly to the line "Heaven lies about us in our infancy." Read the Ode.

Page 83, line 12.—Mount Sinai, the mountain upon which Moses talked with God, when the children of Israel were coming back from captivity in Egypt. What is implied, therefore, in the phrase, "We Sinais climb"?

Page 83, line 17.—The epithet "Druid" has here a double propriety. The Druids were aged men and priests; the venerableness of the wood, therefore, and its power to bless, are in the poet's mind.

Page 84, line 7.—Make clear to yourself by expansion the figure of speech involved in the phrase "Devil's booth."

Page 84, lines 14-15.—Keep in mind the first stanza. As the musician who is extemporizing, letting "his fingers wander as they list," follows wherever chance leads him, so the poet is drawn aside by the chance word "June" into the rapturous contemplation of June weather, although strictly it has no connection with his theme.

Page 84, line 17.—Expand the image suggested in “Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune.”

Page 85, line 10. “Nice.”—Delicately discriminating. Look up the curious history of the word in a good dictionary.

Page 85, lines 11–14.—The four opening lines are of course figurative, not literal.

Page 85, line 21.—In “We may shut our eyes,” etc., notice how the poet cleverly fills out his picture not by direct description, but by indirect hints which we more readily accept. Notice the “internal rhyme,” page 86, line 4; is there anything in the thought to give it significance?

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## PART I

Page 87, line 13.—Observe, in the dream, which follows that the knight sees himself objectively, as another person, and also subjectively, since he knows the thoughts of his own heart. Is this untrue to the facts of the dream-world?

Page 88, line 1.—The figure first suggested by the word “out-posts,” is made clearer a few lines further on by the idea of siege and assault, and becomes very clear and forcible with the words “pavilions” and “tents.” This cumulative treatment of an idea, whether figurative or not, is almost always effective.

Page 88, line 23.—Why “locust-leaf”? Is a locust leaf lighter than other leaves? If not, can you see a reason of another sort for using the word here?

Page 89, line 18.—Is “bent of stature” a good phrase in your opinion?

Page 90, line 10.—By the “all-sustaining Beauty” is meant the Spirit of God, which merges all being into one.



## PRELUDE TO PART II

Page 91, line 11, "Groined."—A groin, in architecture is the solid linear angle formed by the intersection of two barrel vaults. Look at the dictionary illustration if the image is obscure.

Page 91, line 17, "Forest-crypt."—Crypt is the pillared basement of a church; a forest-interior is here called a crypt because of the half-darkness and the pillar-like tree trunks. Is the figure, however, consistent? Do trunks of forest trees bend in a breeze? The word "steel-stemmed" increases the difficulty.

Page 91, line 23, "Arabesques."—A species of ornamentation first used by the Arabs, representing fruits, flowers, leaves, and animals, curiously inter-twined.

Page 92, line 17, "Corbel."—The support for the spring of an arch, in mediæval architecture always elaborately carved.

Page 92, line 20, "Yule-log."—The great "back-log" of the fire-place, brought in at Christmas with much ceremony and merry-making.

Page 92, lines 26-28 - In the last three lines, notice how the fanciful picture, first suggested by "scattering away," is made more vivid by the metaphor "soot-forests," and finally is completed by the simile of the startled deer.

Page 93, lines 2-4.—Is not the use of Sir Launfal's hair as a "harp" for the wind to play a Christmas carol on, a bit grotesque?

Page 93, line 9, "Seneschal."—An officer in great mediæval houses, whose business it was to superintend feasts and other domestic ceremonies.

Page 93, lines 14-15, "Build out its piers," etc.—The poet seems to have two pictures in mind, corresponding to the double meaning of the word pier, either a support for the arch of a bridge, or an abutment built out to strengthen a wall. The light streaming from the window would take the form of

an abutment, but in the phrase "against the drift of the cold," the sweep of the river against a bridge-pier seems to be suggested.

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## PART II

Page 94, lines 7-10.—Is the kind of morning suggested in the four closing lines of this stanza consistent, to your mind, with sunshine, even "cold sun"?

Page 94, line 16, "Surcoat."—A flowing garment worn by a warrior over his mail. The knight's arms or emblem were embroidered upon it.

Page 94, line 17, "The sign."—The sign of the cross.

Page 95, line 2, "Idle."—Useless, vain.

Page 95, line 7, "He sees the snake-like caravan crawl," etc.—Can you discern the poet's purpose in introducing this picture here? Is "crawl" a better word than "move" or "go"? Why?

Page 95, lines 13-15.—Does the discrepancy in size between the "little spring" and the "signal of palms" which it is said to wave, jar upon you? Remember that the palms are seen far off; otherwise they would not be spoken of as a signal.

Page 95, line 23, "Desolate horror," because lepers were outcasts and not permitted to approach the dwellings of men.

Page 96, line 8, "Behold, through him," etc.—The pronouns are a little confusing; "behold, through this leper, I give to thee, Christ."

Page 96, line 12, "Leprosie."—The old spelling is used partly for the antique flavor, and partly because it affords a stronger rhyme syllable.

Page 96, lines 21-22, "Yet with fine wheaten bread" etc.—Not to be taken literally, perhaps, though the poet has in mind the miracle of Cana, where the Lord turned water into wine.

Page 97, line 6, "The pillar that stood by the Beautiful Gate," etc.—The allusion is to "the gate of the temple that is called Beautiful," where Peter healed the lame man; and also to Christ's saying, in the tenth chapter of John, "I am the door."

Page 97, lines 11-13.—Is the simile of the snow falling on the sea consistently carried out; is there anything in Sir Launfal, "musing with downcast face," which suggests "shaggy unrest"? Has not the poet been carried away by his image beyond the point where the correspondence ceases?

Page 97, line 22, "Holy Supper."—The Last Supper of Christ and his disciples, preserved in the communion service of the Church.











